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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a systematic progression of small-sided games within two traditional sports units (soccer and volleyball). Developmentally appropriate guidelines encourage teachers at all levels to incorporate small-sided games (2v2, 3v3, and 4v4). Advantages of small-sided games include: allowing students numerous practice opportunities; keeping students active and involved in game play; decreasing complexity of games, thus increasing student success; allowing for ability groupings; and making assessment easier. Small-sided games need a systematic progression of activities that have a clear lesson focus. If structured correctly, small-sided games can provide many of the progressions that are often missing links in planning. One of the best small-sided game approaches to invasion or goal oriented sports is the grid system. A typical grid system for soccer is included, noting hints for more advanced concepts. In volleyball, students need to be able to control the ball in order to begin playing. A small-sided approach to volleyball begins with the forearm pass, with students in groups of three on either side of the net. The paper explains setup of the game and describes an excellent variation of the basic game entitled King/Queen of the Court. (SM)

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SMALL-SIDED GAMES: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE APPLICATIONS IN TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

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SMALL-SIDED GAMES: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE APPLICATIONS IN TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Developmentally appropriate guidelines encourage teachers at all levels to incorporate small-sided games (2v2, 3v3, 4v4)) in their teaching. Small-sided games are the activities of choice in newer curriculum models such as sport education (Siedentop, 1994) and the tactical approach to teaching (Griffin, Oslin & Mitchell, 1997). However, small-sided games have a place in traditional programs as well. The purpose of this session will be to present a systematic progression of small-sided games within two common traditional sports units: soccer and volleyball.

Advantages of small sided games:

- *allow students numerous practice opportunities;*
- *keep students active and involved in game play;*
- *allow students to more easily assume different roles (forward, goalie, setter, etc.) within the game;*
- *decrease complexity of games thereby increasing student success;*
- *often make more "authentic" and enjoyable practice than contrived skill drills – i.e. you can "play the game" earlier in the unit*
- *allow for groupings based on ability;*
- *make assessment easier.*

However, there is more to planning small-sided games than just telling groups of three or four students to play against each other. Small-sided games need a systematic progression of activities that have a clear lesson focus, just like any good lesson. If structured correctly, small-sided games can provide many of the progressions that are often "missing links" in our planning.

Soccer and other "invasion" type games:

One of the best small-sided game approaches to "invasion" or "goal" oriented sports is the "grid system" (Hichwa, 1998). A grid is simply a square space whose boundaries are designated by cones. The grid provides a work area for groups of students and the size can be adjusted based on the age and ability level of the students involved. The number of students in each grid and the complexity of the skills can be adjusted easily. Certainly, students can be taught to set up their own grids, minimizing the managerial issues of setting up large numbers of cones. A typical progression using the grid system for soccer is included below.

Dribbling –

1. Students dribble by themselves to music, moving within their own grid, practicing stopping when the music stops;
2. Enlarge grid; students practice dribbling with another player who is also dribbling in the same grid. Continue to add objects or other dribbling players as distractions.
3. Make one player "it" ("it" also has a ball) This person's job is to try to cause dribbling players to lose possession of the ball or go outside the grid (game is aka "dribble tag"). Hint: Keep groups small (four dribblers to one "tagger"); use a soccer related penalty (e.g. 25 toe touches on top of the ball) in order to re-enter the game; vary the size of the grid or number of taggers to increase or decrease complexity.

Passing -

1. Two students per grid, passing to each other, moving.
2. Four students per grid, each pair has a soccer ball; move and pass to their partner independently of the other pair. Practice first, then one point for each completed pass in a row. If you lose possession, start the count over again. For more pressure, add a 60 second time limit.
3. Four students per grid, three offense, one defense. Offense passes to each other while defense tries to intercept. Five completed passes equals one point for the offense; defender keeps track of the number of interceptions and counts one point for each. *Hint:* Change defenders every 60 seconds so one student is not "stuck" in the middle.

Combine passing and dribbling –

1. Play 2v2 passing and dribbling. Play either for consecutive passes – i.e. how many passes in a row can you make?); time of possession (who can maintain possession of the ball for 20 seconds?); or dribble and pass the ball over the end line (each time you bring the ball over the endline you get a point).
2. Gradually increase the number of players per grid to 3v3, 4v4, 5v5.

Hints for more advanced concepts –

1. **Teach game strategies in the grid, not just skills**. For example, students can be taught various ways of "getting open" to receive a pass (v-cut, stutter step, etc.). They can practice within the grid, then use those skills in small games.

2. **Take away equipment to further decrease complexity when teaching concepts**. Sometimes it can be difficult to teach a **concept**, such as "getting open", when students have not yet mastered the actual motor **skills** necessary to maintain possession of the ball. Lacrosse is a good example of this. Since the throwing and catching skills involved in lacrosse are difficult, even in a small game, the lacrosse sticks might be temporarily eliminated when teaching a concept. Have students practice the **concept** in the grid (e.g. getting open), using easier equipment (such as a bean bag). When they understand the game or the concept fully, then add the equipment back again.

Volleyball –

In volleyball, students need to be able to control the ball in order to begin to play a game. A small-sided approach to volleyball, therefore, begins with the forearm pass. Students start in groups of three on either side of the net (or a rope on the floor at first). The regulation volleyball court can be divided into two or more sections since only groups of three will be playing.

Set-up

Start with one player in the front center in a setting position, one player in the back row in a receiving position and a third player in the spiking position (on the side of the court, a few steps away from the net). Another group can be set up on the other side of the net but each group of three will work by themselves for now. The player in the spiking position will also be the "tosser".

X receiver

Rope/net ___X setter_____X tosser
X setter X tosser

X receiver

1. The tosser will use a two handed underhand toss with an arc to the receiver on their side of the net. That player will forearm pass to the person in the setting position, who catches the ball. Rotate positions so each person has multiple practice trials. Make this more of a game by putting the setter in a hoop. Count one point each time the back row player makes a forearm pass that can be caught by the setter without moving outside the hoop.
2. Involve the team on the other side of the net by having the tosser from the other team toss the ball (underhand, with an arc) to the back row player on the opposite team. The ball must be forarm passed to the setter who can either forarm pass (since the forearm pass is the lesson focus) over the net or to the spiker/(tosser) who can forearm pass the ball over the net. Play a simple game, alternating "serve" (toss) on each point. Teams get a point if the other team does not return the ball into their court or if the other team does not use a forearm pass. You can add a two hit rule (e.g. there must be two hits on the same side of the court to have a legal hit. The receiver cannot forearm pass directly over the net).
3. Extend the idea by adding other skills. For example, the next progression might have students in the same positions. The tosser would toss to their own receiving teammate who would forearm pass to the setter who would set the ball to the person in the spiking position who would catch the ball. Score a point for each complete rotation on your side of the net.
4. Play over the net with the same rules as #2: opposite team tosses to receiver, who forearm passes to setter, who sets the ball to the spiker, who forearm passes the ball over the net. Teams must complete the forearm pass, set, forearm pass sequence in order to score a point.
5. Continue the sequence with an "attempted" spike.

Hint –

An excellent variation of this basic game system is the game "King/Queen (Ruler?) of the Court". It also works as a good warm-up activity in a volleyball unit.

Have two teams set up, just as described above, 3 v 3 on a small court. The team on the top (see diagram) is the "winning team" (King/Queen of the Court); the team on the bottom is the challenge team. The team behind the line is waiting.

X
X X **Winners Side ("King/Queen of the Court")**
_____Net/Rope on floor_
X X
X **Challenge Team**

XXX **Waiting Team**

Teams play for one point and rotate. You can structure the rules as in any of the examples above, depending on what the focus of the lesson is. The tosser on the "winning team" starts play. If the point is won by the winning team, they remain ("King/Queen") on the court . The challenge team rotates off and the waiting team comes on. If the challenging team wins the point, the Kings/Queens team rotates off to the waiting position and the challengers move to the winners side. The waiting team always moves on to the court. Each game is one point. Points usually go quickly and students stay motivated.

Physical education is changing rapidly and the "new" p.e. calls for more appropriate ways of teaching traditional games. Using systems, such as those mentioned above, for teaching small-sided games helps make something old, new again.

Some good references for small sided games:

Griffin, L., Mitchell, S. Oslin, J., (1997). Teaching Sports Concepts and Skills. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Hichwa, J. (1998). Right fielders are people too. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Siedentop, D. (1995). Sport Education. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.